

[Folklore of Drug Store Employees]

Beliefs & Customs - Folk Stuff 14

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 29 1/2 Morton Street, New York City

DATE March 6, 1939

SUBJECT Folklore of Drug Store Employees

1. Date and time of interview March 5, 11 p.m.
2. Place of interview Life Cafeteria
3. Name and address of informant Eli Griefer
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 29 1/2 Morton Street, New York City

DATE March 6, 1939

SUBJECT Folklore of Drug Store Employees OH ASPIRIN!

I've always been a great believer in aspirin. Aspirin is good for anything that ails you. Get me right. This ain't no hit or miss statement — I've been in the drug business for seven years, and I've studied these things. Believe me, I know the human mechanism inside out. Your average customer don't know the first thing about the workings of their own body — and what's more they've developed a lot of prejudicial ideas about treatment of simple ailments. They don't know, for instance, that the seat of most troubles is the stomach. You got a healthy stomach, chances are you'll be feeling up to par. On the other hand, your stomach's on the blink, and you're liable to feel it in any part of your body — maybe your head, maybe your throat, maybe your ankles or your ears — makes no difference, you can charge it up to the old solar plexus. Nine times out of ten. Now aspirin gets right to the seat of the trouble — the stomach. First place, it acts like a mild laxative, see — and besides that, it's a good antiseptic for the blood — purifies it. And listen, even if aspirin might not always cure you, it can never harm you. Now you're gonna give me that crap about aspirin being bad for the heart — I've heard that so many times that I can always see it coming — people think aspirin affects the heart — phooey! A superstition. Nothing but superstition. I

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had an aunt who used to take six aspirin tablets a day. Regularly. And it never phased her heart. She lived to be seventy-two, and died of gall bladder trouble.

Now you take the common cold. Ever stop to think that nobody's yet discovered what a cold is? Not even doctors know what causes it. The commonest of ailments, and they still haven't found no effective way to prevent it. But aspirin will cure it. Aspirin's the best thing for a cold. Ask any doctor. He'll prescribe aspirin for a cold. Yet many people are prejudiced against it — say it's bad for the heart. Like once I had a woman come into the store and ask for something to relieve a cold. I gave her a little talk on aspirin. But she wouldn't hear of it — shot right up into the air, said it was bad for the heart. 'Alright, lady', I says, 'remember that a little aspirin tablet might have saved you. Remember that,' I says.

Well, three days later, her daughter comes in — a girl of about sixteen — with the same complaint, a bad cold. Wants me to suggest something. 'Try aspirin', I says. 'Oh, no. Mother says aspirin's bad for the heart.' That's the way a superstition grows — mothers teaching their own children nonsense! Anyway, so I says to the kid: 'Well, how's your mother?' And guess what she said, she 3 said, 'Oh mother's in the hospital with pneumonia'!

Well, there it is. What more proof can you have? Another time, I remember — this was when I was in the hospital myself, had an operation — well, they wheel in a guy that looks like a corpse. He's stiff as a board, his arms at his sides, layin' on his back. Can't even move his head. Only his eyes was moving. And he could talk a little, that's all he could do, move his mouth and eyes. And they had to feed/ him through the veins. He was paralyzed from head to foot. Well, during the night, this guy starts moaning and carrying on, and keeps me awake. So, I leans over to him, and says, 'here, pal, have an aspirin. It'll relieve your pain.' See, I always carry a few boxes on me — wherever I go I have at least one box of aspirin with me — and I happened to have a box under the pillow for my own use. So I says to the guy, 'have one.' 'Nothin doin', he says. 'I got a weak heart.' I talked to him, tried to make him understand — but he wouldn't listen. Same thing, a weak heart — the heart

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can't stand aspirin! It's ridiculous! But wait — the next morning when the doc came around to examine him, I heard the doctor talking to the nurse. And here's what he said: 'Give him a dose of acetyl salicylic acid, every three hours — and keep giving it to him till it runs out of his ears!' What's acetyl salicylic acid? Aspirin! Plain and simple aspirin. Look it up in the dispensatory, if you don't believe me.

Well, there it is. You probably think I got a bug on this here aspirin or something. Well, maybe I have. But believe me, if more people had a bug on it, there'd be less crying about colds, headaches, and what not. Fact is, I actually wrote a poem about aspirin once. No kidding. It was published in the 'Pharmacist's weekly' — they have a page for contributors. Course, it's 4 written in a humourous vein, you know — but there's nothin funny about haw I feel about aspirin. Believe me, it's good for anything that ails you. Seriously, I mean it.

OH ASPIRIN! Oh Aspirin anticeptic My gratitude to you For you are my true friend in need
When I am sick and blue. While food reformers add reproach To headaches so depressing
You ask not why, if pie or rye, But give me your kind blessing. Oh Aspirin, thou noblest son
or salicylic acid Like sire, you disinfect the bowells While making pained nerves placid.
Each weekend I would suffer pain For I thought drugs a sin But I consider pain a sin Since
taking aspirin. *****

'DEAR DRUGS'

Romance? Well no, there ain't much room for romance workin' in a drug store. Sure, plenty women come in, but they aren't interested in the clerk. They're interested in a corn plaster, or a box of cough drops. Or you get an A.B. case (*1) now and then. But I never let that kind get interested.

Ever stop to think, a clerk of any kind is nothin but a robot to his customers. A pair of arms that reaches around the counter and makes up your dose for you. A dame should worry you wear pants or not — you're just a robot, that's all.

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Just the same, I had an admirer once. No kiddin. This was

(*1) abortion case 5 years ago. I'll bet she's makin some guy a sweet little tart right now. Her name was Patricia. Patricia Blake. Blond and blue-eyed...See, one day lunch-hour, I was out to lunch. I never eat lunch in the store — there's a fountain there, but you get fed up on the store, after a morning's work, and so I used to catch a bite around the corner at the cafeteria. So when I came back, the relief clerk hands me a folded note, and he gives me this story. Seems this little girl came in and asked for me, and I wasn't there, so the guy asks her what he can do for her. Nothing, she says, she has to see me. So he says, what do you want? Does she want to buy something. Never mind, says the kid. I want to speak to Mr. Griefer. It's personal, she says. So the fella tells her to leave a note. And I unfold the piece of paper, and in large print, here's what I see: 'Dear Drugs: I love you. Patricia Blake.'

'Holy cats', I busts out. 'What did she look like?' 'Oh, she was a good looker,' says my pal, and he describes her looks. 'Only,' he says, 'she's still a little too young for you — she looked to be about six years old.'

Well, that's been my luck you know. Only children take to me. But you know it really touched me — that 'Dear Drugs, I love you'. The simplicity and sincerity of it. So I sat down and composed a poem to my only admirer, little Patricia Blake: ...Patricia Blake, I have your letter Wherewith thou my heard didst fetter Where, addressing me - 'Dear Drugs' Three sweet words thou scrawldest Each tugs My heartstrings. 'I love you', it read And these three words awoke and fed My hope that's long been withered, wan In a world where love is under ban.